

## **Minutes for Alabama Citrus Industry Meeting, December 9, 2021**

The Alabama Citrus Industry met at the auditorium in the Beard Building at 1 PM CST on the 9<sup>th</sup> of December 2021. All citrus growers, both plant and fruit were invited. Christel Stewart, director of Plant Protection, chaired the meeting. The purpose of the meet was to discuss recent Citrus Canker finding in the Mobile and Baldwin county area.

Christel welcomed everyone and introductions were made. Commissioner Pate was in attendance and he spoke to the roughly two dozen in attendance. He reminded everyone of what our job at Agriculture was and the importance of getting on top of Citrus Canker now.

There were three on a conference call from the USDA.

Christel began the meeting by explaining what Citrus Canker was and a brief history of the disease. She was explaining how to identify it when Kassie Conner, with the Extension Service asked if it had been found on stems. Brittany Allen with Plant protection answered that it had been found on stems in a residential site in Baldwin County. Christel continued, relating measures take to survey the extent of the spread and what is necessary to control the disease. The primary method was performing regular decontamination of workers/surveyors while in the field, use of disposable protection equipment and decontamination of equipment. All infected plant were disposed of by incineration. Great care is needed not to move or remove the infected plant from the area. If it is necessary, the plant must be covered by 12" of soil (or landfill debris) or double bagged and all persons and equipment must be thoroughly decontaminated afterwards. The three methods of disposal are, burying, burning or incinerating. If burying, the plant must be covered by a foot of dirt and not disturbed.

Brittany Allen spoke next, explaining the types and process of surveying Citrus. The first is an annual survey which is a routine survey looking for any issues. The other is a delimiting survey which is performed once a discovery of a pest or disease is found. In a delimiting survey, a five-mile radius around the original positive site is drawn from the point of the infected plant and all citrus plants within that band are checked. This includes commercial as well as homeowner plants. If additional infections are found within that band, another five-mile band is drawn from that plant. Brittany then showed a map of all positive sites and what was done to eliminate the problem. The cost of a delimiting survey is approximately \$27,000.00 every two weeks.

Christel spoke about the Quarantine area. Because it is a Federal and State pathogen, a quarantine is required. Next, she explained the issues facing nurseries in a local quarantine verses a State-wide quarantine. She also explained the requirements of shipping plants and fruits into and out of a quarantine area.

A question was asked as to what are the Citrus growing States? Answer, Florida, California, Texas and Louisiana. A follow up question as to why Alabama was not listed, the answer was that the State had applied but had not been approved. With each application, a change of administration or requirements placed the application process back at the beginning. Both Georgia and Mississippi grow Citrus, but neither is recognized as a citrus growing state.

Christel continued with requirements of growing in a quarantine and to avoid them a grower must grow in an exclusion facility. The effect on fruit is minimal as Canker is not harmful to humans but the appearance will reduce the price and limit movement of the fruit.

Question, If a grower takes the sanitizing steps can they sell outside the quarantine area? The short answer is yes but those steps must be taken.

Links to information about Canker were on the slide of the presentation. Those in attendance would be sent the presentation so they would have the links.

There are thirteen active citrus plant growers in the State, of which six are in Mobile and Baldwin counties. There are 132 fruit producers split between Mobile/Baldwin counties and the Wiregrass area. There are 9 packing houses, most of which are located at the larger growers which means the majority of the growers sell locally.

Question, Can the quarantine area be smaller than a county? Texas was used as an example and it was stated that it may have been because of the size of the counties and proximity of the growers. Ultimately, that decision belongs to the Commissioner.

Q. Do we have resources to help Growers? A. some which were explained later. They involve mitigating measures and some treatment.

Q. How long has the State been requesting to be recognized as a Citrus producing State? A. Since the 90's but the USDA seems reluctant to approve. The question was posed to the USDA on the line but no response.

Q. How do we compare to other non-recognized Citrus states such as Louisiana, Georgia and Mississippi? A. Not sure, will find out.

Q. What can we do on a political front? A. The Commissioner replied that he was just now hearing this was an issue and would see what could be done.

Q. Is there a chemical treatment to control or eradicate Canker? A. Yes, a treatment of copper which is also being used for Sweet Orange Spot. But it poses other environmental and consumption issues.

Q. Who pays for the survey? A. Usually, the USDA and State split the cost.

Next, Dr. Kassie Conner spoke on Citrus Canker. She illustrated how to identify Canker in plants and fruit and stressed how the Canker enters the plant. By wind forcing the bacterium into the Stoma or from injury due to pest or plant damage. She stated that Canker is found everywhere citrus is grown and showed a map that illustrated that all canker originated from Japan or the Philippines. She elaborated on management of Canker by stressing Sanitation, pest control and plant treatment from storm damage and by decontamination of workers and equipment. To mitigate infection, the use of wind breaks can significantly reduce the spread and the application of Copper can be used to treat the plant. The best step to take is pest control, specifically the Leaf miner. Damage caused by this pest significantly increases the risk to susceptibility. In addition, the Extension Service is looking at increasing education, especially to the homeowner/grower as they are major source of Canker.

Auburn University has a greenhouse for Citrus which includes 60 plants and 28 cultivars. They are just now beginning to work on Canker as their prior focus was on Sweet Orange Spot.

Q. What is the Spread of Canker in Texas? A. Do not know.

Q. Will cold weather affect Canker? A. As long as the host survives, it will survive.

Q. Does Canker live in other plants? It has been found in other plants in the citrus family. There are some, however, that seem to be less affected.

Q. If Canker was only found in one potted Plant in Mobile county, why quarantine the entire county? A. We have eliminated the source and will perform a delimiting survey to see if it has spread. If we do not find additional cases, we can remove Mobile from Quarantine.

Q. Can Canker and Citrus Greening quarantine be combined? A. Yes, it is the Commissioner's decision.

#### Next Steps

We will look at the information the Growers provide to us and the results of the surveys. We will send out links to information to the attendees.

Proposal – Substitute the word Canker for Greening in the Alabama Code to expedite the process of writing a code for canker. (no motion or ruling was decided on this.)

Q. Who requires the 5-mile survey and who draws the boundaries? A. USDA requirement for 5-mile survey and boundary is not strictly a circle but is drawn by the State.

Auburn University is working to strengthen the regulations governing citrus production in Alabama. Christel invited public feedback on the topic by Christmas. The growers want feedback from what is found in the survey, so they know what they are dealing with. The response was typically if you don't hear anything, nothing was found.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:15 PM.